



PSC NEWS

Missouri Public Service Commission

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PSC SAYS TELEPHONE BILLS NEED TO BE EASIER TO UNDERSTAND

Jefferson City (August 16, 2004)---The Missouri Public Service Commission has urged the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) to consider rules within its truth-in-billing regulations that would prohibit carriers from placing monthly surcharges on customer telephone bills that were not authorized or mandated by federal, state or local regulatory action.

The Commission's comments generally support a petition previously filed with the FCC by the National Association of State Utility Consumer Advocates (NASUCA). NASUCA is asking the FCC to revise its truth-in-billing rules to prohibit the many carrier line item fees and surcharges that purport to recover various regulatory administrative and/or government mandated costs.

"Line Item fees and surcharges make it difficult for consumers to comparison shop for telecommunications services and allow carriers to offer low per/minute or monthly fixed rates, while recovering various costs in surcharges and fees that may not be disclosed during marketing conversations unless the consumer asks the appropriate questions," the Missouri Public Service Commission said in comments to the FCC.

For the reasons similar to the NASUCA petition, the Missouri Public Service Commission continues to move forward in drafting a proposed rulemaking in Missouri that would outline the requirements for applying monthly charges and taxes for in-state telecommunications services. "One of our goals is to try to make telephone bills easier to understand," stated PSC Chair Steve Gaw. "We expect to have a working document from the PSC Staff in the very near future."

The Commission, in comments to the FCC, stated: "The FCC's truth-in-billing rules require customer bills to be clear and require all charges to be conspicuously displayed on the bills. The rules also require companies to provide a description of all charges that appear on the bill. Despite this attempt to make telecommunications bills easier to understand, they can become confusing to customers when they contain added line-item charges."

The Missouri PSC has recommended that the FCC "declare that carriers are prohibited from imposing line item charges unless those items are expressly authorized or mandated by federal, state or local regulatory action, and the amount of such charge conforms to the amount expressly authorized or mandated by federal, state, or local governmental authority".